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Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations: cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 55/19 of 8 November 2000, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-sixth session on the various aspects of cooperation between the two organizations.

2. The report describes the action taken by the two organizations to secure parliamentary input to recent major United Nations events, as well as the parliamentary action, coordinated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), to support or complement the work of the United Nations, in particular in the areas of peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights, democracy, governance and gender issues.

II. Follow-up to the Millennium Summit and the Conference of Presiding Officers

3. The Millennium Assembly of Heads of State and Government held at the United Nations in September 2000 and the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments recognized the importance of forging closer working relations between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In his report to the General Assembly dated 26 June 2001 (A/55/996), the Secretary-General, having reviewed the latest developments in the cooperation between both organizations and consulted with the IPU and Member States, made specific recommendations on how to establish a new, strengthened and formalized relationship between IPU, the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs, as requested in General Assembly resolution 55/19.

* Owing to important recent events related to the agenda item, the report could not be submitted at an earlier date.

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III. Contribution of Parliaments to major United Nations events

A. Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries

4. The IPU assisted the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in preparing and holding a high-level Parliamentary Round Table on the occasion of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in Brussels. The Round Table, which was held on 14 May 2001, brought together some 150 delegates, including around 70 parliamentarians, mainly from the least developed countries.

5. The debate focused on the following three themes: debt relief and capital flows as key elements of financing for development; problems of agricultural development and commodities trade; and technological advancement and capacity-building, including from a gender perspective. The following day, the IPU representative at the Conference delivered a message on behalf of the Union to the Conference and reported on the work of the Round Table.

B. Special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS

6. At the special session of the General Assembly, the *Handbook for Legislators on HIV/AIDS, Law and Human Rights* was made widely available in coordination with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), which co-authored the booklet with IPU.

7. As part of the follow-up to that session by IPU, the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, held in Ouagadougou in September 2001, discussed the item entitled "Urgent action to combat HIV/AIDS and other pandemics which seriously endanger public health, and economic, social and political development and even threaten the survival of many nations". The discussion took into consideration the conclusions of the special session of the General Assembly and will aim at a comprehensive resolution in which parliaments will articulate their own commitment to the fight against HIV/AIDS.

C. World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

8. At the 105th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, held in Havana in April 2001, the IPU Council endorsed the holding of a one-day parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, scheduled to be held in Durban, South Africa, from 31 August to 7 September 2001. The parliamentary meeting was held on 2 September 2001 and focused on the specific role that parliaments and their members can play in the fight against racism, in particular with respect to three themes: the tension between freedom of speech and incitement to hatred; providing adequate protection to migrants; and special measures to ensure equality, including affirmative action.

D. Special session of the General Assembly on children

1. Contribution to the session

9. As part of the IPU contribution to the special session, the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference discussed the item entitled "Protecting and caring for children, the driving force of future society". The United Nations Children's Fund and IPU will jointly organize a *Parliamentarians Forum on Children,* during which members of parliament attending the special session will have an opportunity to discuss legislative strategies to promote the well-being of children and women and to discuss specific measures to implement the goals set by the special session.

2. Worst forms of child labour

10. As part of a strengthened partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), IPU and ILO are jointly preparing a handbook for parliamentarians on issues related to the worst forms of child labour. The handbook is expected to be launched towards the end of 2001, and should be instrumental in promoting accession to ILO Convention No. 182 and the adoption of legislation, policies and programmes consistent with its provisions. It should also help to enhance parliamentary awareness of the risks inherent in such

labour for national economic and social development and promote good practices in curbing such risks.

IV. Peace and security

A. Peace and security in the Mediterranean

11. In the context of its endeavours to further security and cooperation in the Mediterranean through its Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean, IPU has continued its biannual meetings of representatives of the countries concerned. In the last few months, debates have centred around the establishment, in the long run, of a parliamentary assembly of Mediterranean States and, despite difficulties resulting from the situation in the Middle East, a blueprint for such an institution is being developed. Those directly involved in the process are the parliaments of all the States around the Mediterranean shores, with the addition of Jordan and Portugal; Palestine is an associate member.

B. Middle East

12. At its 104th Conference, held in Jakarta in October 2000, IPU issued a resolution calling for an end to tension, protection of civilians under the terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention and action to save the peace process in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

13. With the aim of promoting dialogue between the parties at the parliamentary level, the IPU Committee on Middle East Questions met with members of the Israeli Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council in Paris in January 2001. At the invitation of Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian representatives, the Committee also undertook a mission to Jordan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory from 1 to 6 June 2001. The Committee has invited the Speakers of the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council to meet in Geneva at a mutually convenient time.

C. Cyprus

14. The IPU biannual dialogue between political leaders on both sides of the conflict resumed at the 106th Inter-Parliamentary Conference and is expected to continue to provide support for the Secretary-General's efforts to promote a political settlement in Cyprus.

D. Terrorism

15. At the 105th Inter-Parliamentary Conference, delegates from over 130 national parliaments adopted by consensus a resolution, entitled "Contribution of the world s parliaments to the struggle against terrorism, in conformity with resolution 55/158 of the United Nations General Assembly".

16. In the resolution, strong backing was expressed for United Nations efforts to fight terrorism, including through support for General Assembly resolution 55/158 of 12 December 2000 and resolution 2000/30 of the Commission on Human Rights. In the resolution, all States and Governments were urged to renounce and outlaw the financing, encouragement, provision of training or support for terrorist activities, as well as the conduct in their territory of terrorist activities against other States, individuals or groups of individuals.

E. Military coups

17. In recognition of the threat posed to democracy worldwide by the forceful seizure of power, IPU included on the agenda of its 104th Conference, held in Jakarta in October 2000, an item on "The prevention of military and other coups against democratically elected Governments and against the free will of peoples expressed through direct suffrage, and action to address grave violations of the human rights of parliamentarians".

18. The consensus emerging from the debate on the item was that military coups should be a thing of the past and that strong action has to be taken to ensure that the will of the people is not subverted by such undemocratic acts.

19. In the resulting resolution, IPU condemns the unconstitutional seizure of power and calls for the international isolation of regimes emanating from such processes, and urges action to step up the fight against impunity. It advocates the building of a culture of peace and non-violence as a vital ingredient for the development of democracy and good governance.

V. Economic and social development

A. Financing for development

20. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has continued its internal debate about this issue, in order to provide a substantive parliamentary contribution to the forthcoming United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development, scheduled to be held in March 2002 and, beyond that event, to ensure that the development objectives of the 1990s will be fulfilled through adequate financing.

21. A resolution entitled "Financing for development and a new paradigm of economic and social development designed to eradicate poverty" was adopted at the 104th Inter-Parliamentary Conference. The text of the resolution has been included in the database on policy texts of the Financing for Development web site of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. The resolution espoused a number of general principles that should govern development financing, and calls upon parliaments to engage themselves more extensively, both at home and abroad, in discussions and activities relating to financing for development.

B. Sustainable development

22. Consistent with earlier initiatives in support of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, such as the 1992 Brasilia parliamentary meeting on sustainable development, IPU is closely following the substantive preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development to be held in Johannesburg in 2002.

23. Following consultations with the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, IPU has mobilized parliaments to become actively involved in the national review processes of Agenda 21. The Union is also urging parliaments to fill the policy gaps that will have become apparent from those reviews by tabling the required implementing legislation, beginning with measures to implement one of the most important recommendations of the Conference on Environment and Development, namely, the integration of environmental, social and economic factors into comprehensive national sustainable development strategies.

C. Trade and development

24. On 8 and 9 June 2001, in Geneva, IPU organized the first global parliamentary meeting on international trade on the theme "For a free, just and equitable multilateral trading system: providing a parliamentary dimension". The meeting was attended by close to 200 members of parliaments from some 75 countries who specialize in trade issues. The participants held a parliamentary hearing with the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The two-day debate was spread over three panels which discussed globalization from a trade perspective, WTO and the current international trading system, and parliamentary oversight with respect to future trade negotiations.

25. The participants adopted a declaration in which they recognized the need to intensify activities in national parliaments to oversee and influence government policy in relation to trade negotiations. At the international level, this should be complemented by meetings to obtain and share information, exchange views and experiences and discuss the structure, working methods and issues facing Governments at WTO.

26. The participants also called upon IPU to organize a follow-up meeting of members of parliaments attending the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference to be held in Doha from 9 to 13 November 2001, as part of their national delegations. Plans are now being made by IPU, in cooperation with other parliamentary institutions, to hold such a meeting.

D. Desertification

27. The Union strengthened cooperation with the secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and sponsored a third Round Table of Parliamentarians in Bonn on 12 and 13 December 2000, on the occasion of the fourth session of the Conference of Parties to the Convention.

28. The Round Table unanimously adopted a declaration, which was then submitted to the Intergovernmental Conference advocating the creation within the Global Environment Facility of an additional funding instrument for the implementation of the

Convention. In addition, the decision was taken to set up a "High-level Forum of Members of Parliament", to serve as a sort of permanent bureau of the Round Table and comprise a president, a rapporteur and five vice-presidents with geographically balanced membership.

E. Food security and right to food

29. As part of its cooperation agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), IPU is following up on its earlier parliamentary conference on food security which it organized in cooperation with FAO and the Italian Parliament in Rome in November 1998. The Union is currently mobilizing national parliaments in support of the "World Food Summit: five years later" scheduled to be held in November 2001.

30. The Union is also working with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the right to food in the preparation of material to facilitate parliamentary awareness and action on issues relating to the right to food.

VI. International law and human rights

A. Commission on Human Rights

31. The Bureau of the Commission on Human Rights has expressed support for strengthening the relationship between IPU, the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs. Its unanimous view is that action ought to be taken on this issue with a view to making possible a contribution by IPU to the next session of the Commission in 2002.

B. Observance of international law

32. The Union contributed to the ongoing debate on securing observance of international law in the interests of world peace and security by debating the subject as one of the main agenda items of its 105th Conference. The Conference adopted by consensus a resolution in which it expressed support for recent efforts to improve protection for the rights of women and children in times of conflict, urged all States to accede to or ratify international instruments and called for the complete ban on all weapons of mass destruction. In the resolution, IPU explicitly supports United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) aimed at securing greater participation by women in decision-making relating to the prevention, management and peaceful settlement of disputes.

33. In the past few months, IPU has pursued its work to promote parliamentary awareness of the importance of securing respect for international humanitarian law. It is currently carrying out a new enquiry on the subject in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In 1999, the Union issued a handbook for parliamentarians, entitled "Respect for International Humanitarian Law" in conjunction with ICRC, which has been translated into 12 languages.

C. Situation in Afghanistan

34. The alarming situation in Afghanistan prompted IPU to debate at its 105th Conference an item on "International action to meet the emergency situation in Afghanistan, compounded by the recent destruction of cultural heritage by the Taliban". In discussing the issue, members of parliament reviewed the disquieting situation in Afghanistan, characterized by widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In the related resolution, they expressed grave concern over the destruction of humankind's cultural heritage in Afghanistan and called for Member States of the United Nations to take more stringent measures to ensure that the Taliban regime complied with internationally accepted norms. The Taliban was urged to ensure that women and girls have unrestricted and equal access to health care, education and employment outside the home. They further called for a greater role for the United Nations in bringing about a multi-ethnic, democratic and representative government in Afghanistan.

D. Refugees

1. Status and implementation of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees

35. The institutional partnership between IPU and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been strengthened over the last two years and will be developed further in the years

ahead, as a result of a resolution adopted by the IPU Conference in April on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In its resolution, IPU reaffirmed its conviction that the Convention and its Protocol constitute the foundation of the refugee protection regime and expressed awareness of the need to develop new approaches, tools and standards to ensure the continuing vitality and relevance of the Convention.

36. The resolution called for universal adherence to the Convention and urged parliaments to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, for example by holding a debate on the refugee issue. It also encouraged them to take an interest in and contribute to the Global Consultations on International Protection undertaken by UNHCR and their subsequent follow-up.

37. The resolution also drew attention to the need for parliaments, when debating and adopting the national budget, to address the need for adequate financial resources to be provided to national institutions and to UNHCR. It also welcomed General Assembly resolution 55/76, adopted on 4 December 2000, in which the Assembly decided that, as from 20 June 2001, 20 June would be celebrated as World Refugee Day. IPU encouraged parliaments to engage in activities supporting refugees on that day.

2. Parliamentary awareness

38. The Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNHCR are jointly preparing a handbook for parliamentarians on the central role of international refugee law in refugee protection. The handbook is expected to be launched in the last quarter of 2001 and will form part of the IPU strategy to promote universal ratification of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as to mobilize political and material support to UNHCR efforts in addressing the plight of refugees and other persons of concern to it.

VII. Democracy, governance and gender issues

A. Gender perspective in institutional work

39. Consistent with the Beijing Platform for Action, IPU promotes gender partnership in all fields and, more especially, in politics. A Gender Partnership Group has been entrusted with the mission of generating structural and organizational changes within IPU. After consulting with its member parliaments, the Union is moving towards imposing possible sanctions on single gender delegations, while promoting gender awareness in all its work.

40. In its report of April 2001, the Gender Partnership Group stressed that parity and gender partnership did not only concern women's emancipation and cultural values, but also encompassed social, economic and political issues, and that it would be pointless to believe that a society could survive and prosper without equal participation between men and women in all of the sectors of which it was composed.

41. In the same vein, at its last conference, IPU discussed ways of providing a parliamentary dimension to United Nations action with regard to gender issues. On that occasion, participants heard a statement by the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, who took part in a question-and-answer session which focused on the role of parliaments and their members in the ratification of international treaties and the introduction of national enabling legislation. The discussion on ways to enhance cooperation in this field was pursued during the 106th IPU Conference held in Ouagadougou.

B. Gender-sensitive national laws

42. Throughout the past year, IPU has pursued its action aimed at enhancing the inclusion of a gender perspective in national laws. A special focus was placed on the national budget. Within the framework of its cooperation agreement with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IPU held a seminar for members and parliamentary staffers of English-speaking African parliaments on "Parliament and the budgetary process, including from a gender perspective" in Nairobi in May 2000. In response to the interest expressed by many parliaments, a similar meeting for the parliaments of French-speaking Africa will be held from 1 to 3 November 2001 in Mali. In addition, initial preparatory work has begun, with UNDP, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the World Bank, to develop a

practical handbook for parliamentarians on ways to develop a gender-sensitive national budget.

C. Gender-sensitive constitutions

43. In June 2001 IPU organized, with UNDP support and in cooperation with the Rwandan Transitional National Assembly and the Forum of Women Parliamentarians of Rwanda, a seminar on "Engendering a new constitution for Rwanda" in Kigali. The seminar, which benefited from the input of the United Nations Development Fund for Women and ECA, brought together all Rwandan members of Parliament, representatives of the commission responsible for drafting the new Constitution, representatives from Rwandan women's associations and various international organizations. It aimed at sensitizing all parties to the need for and ways of ensuring that a gender perspective is included in Rwanda's new Constitution. The meeting led to further actions aimed at channelling women's contribution to the constitutional process, in collaboration with grass-roots women's organizations, with the support of IPU, UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and ECA.

D. Participation in political life

1. Education and culture as factors in political participation

44. The 105th IPU Conference adopted a resolution reviewing the various educational and cultural factors limiting men and women's equal participation in political life. In the resolution, IPU asserted the need for ensuring gender equality in all sectors of society, and called upon parliaments to reinforce their action in this field, and more particularly, to implement the education policy commitments adopted by the World Education Forum in its Dakar Framework for Action, entitled "Education For All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments" and the "World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs", as swiftly and effectively as possible. It also called for support to action by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in this field.

2. Statistical data

45. The Inter-Parliamentary Union continued its activities relating to the collection and production of statistical data concerning women's participation in politics. On the occasion of International Women's Day, it issued specific data on women's progress and setbacks in parliaments further to legislative elections held during 2000, which were circulated at the time of the session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

46. The Union also contributed substantially to the *Human Development Report 2001: Making New Technologies Work for Human Development*, with statistical data on women in parliament and in the Executive.

3. Database

47. In March 2000, in cooperation with UNDP, IPU launched its online bibliographic database, entitled "A gender perspective on politics". The database is regularly updated and was recently enhanced with the inclusion of references to post-Beijing national action plans and national reports to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

E. Promotion of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

48. An important field of cooperation between the two organizations is action for the respect of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol.

49. In close cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, IPU organized an information panel on the Optional Protocol to the Convention during the 105th IPU Conference held in Havana. The panel brought together the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Cuban member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as well as leading parliamentary figures in IPU. It offered an opportunity for men and women parliamentarians to learn about the Protocol and the procedures it introduces, to gain an

understanding of the way in which it can be used and to clarify what parliaments need to do in the field.

50. As a follow-up to the panel discussion held in Havana, IPU is developing, in cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women, a booklet for parliamentarians on the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

51. Continuing to mobilize the parliaments of those States that are due to submit their national report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, IPU has also sent out letters encouraging the parliaments concerned to make sure that the national reports are submitted on time and with all requisite data, and that parliament is involved in discussing its contents as well as the ensuing recommendations of the Committee.

F. Advisory services and technical assistance to parliaments

52. Pursuant to one of its objectives, which is to contribute to the promotion of representative institutions and democracy, IPU devotes a substantial part of its resources to strengthening the capacity of national parliaments. In so doing, it plays the role of designer, implementer and coordinator of assistance to parliaments, primarily in Africa and Asia, relying on several donors for financial and other assistance.

53. In this context, it is gradually building a strategic partnership with UNDP, which continues to be the Union's leading operational partner, funding about 70 per cent of ongoing projects. In September 2000, a major review was conducted of the first year of the Parliamentary Support Programme initiated under the cooperation agreement concluded with UNDP in October 1998. The agreement covers a period of three years, with funding of approximately $1.5 million. In addition to activities intended to strengthen national parliamentary institutions, the agreement seeks to promote gender partnership in all aspects of politics and oversees studies and surveys on best practices in parliamentary and governance process.

54. Currently, IPU is implementing and/or supervising, with funding from UNDP, projects in Cambodia, East Timor, Gabon, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Tajikistan and Yemen. Other projects are being initiated in Albania and Uruguay.

55. The partnership with UNDP extends beyond the immediate field of good governance. Consultations have been under way during 2001 with the UNDP Administrator and senior management to develop a more comprehensive partnership in which IPU would provide a parliamentary contribution to the main development challenges facing the United Nations system.

56. Recently, cooperation with ECA and the World Bank Institute has been stepped up in the area of assistance to parliaments. The Union is currently involved in discussions with these two institutions and other partners, with a view to designing core programmes for the strengthening of parliaments.

G. Volunteers

57. In an address to the 105th IPU Conference, the Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Volunteers programme explored avenues and mechanisms of cooperation in the context of efforts to promote democracy and good governance, especially through technical assistance to national parliaments. At the initiative of the delegation of Mexico, IPU subsequently adopted a resolution of support to the International Year of Volunteers (2001).

58. The Secretary-General of IPU has been asked to collect from national parliaments, in consultation with the organizations concerned, data on action taken at the national level to give effect to the resolution and on existing legislation in the field. The report is to be presented to the IPU Council in April 2002.

H. The fight against corruption

59. At the request of the Government of the Netherlands, IPU organized a half-day parliamentary session on the occasion of the second Global Forum on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity which was held at The Hague from 28 to 31 May 2001. The overall objective of the Forum was to keep the promotion of integrity and the fight against corruption high on the political agenda. It therefore sought to raise awareness and to discuss concrete strategies in the fight against corruption.

60. The parliamentary session, which was organized in cooperation with the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions, focused on the role of

parliaments and supreme audit institutions in the fight against corruption. The recommendations adopted at the end of the session reflect the desire of the parliamentary community to contribute to the global struggle against corruption at the legislative level.

61. The ministerial declaration adopted at the end of the Forum outlines best practices and building blocks for a new United Nations instrument against corruption. It also contains recommendations for more effective national anti-corruption strategies.

VIII. Secretariat arrangements

62. The IPU Liaison Office in New York continued its active role in facilitating and increasing the cooperation between the two organizations.

63. The Liaison Office provides an important link in the ongoing discussions with the United Nations Secretariat and Member States on the status of IPU with the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies. On behalf of the Geneva-based IPU secretariat, the Liaison Office also helps to negotiate and streamline IPU participation in the operational activities and other initiatives of the United Nations agencies and programmes headquartered in New York.

IX. Concluding remarks

64. As is evident from the present report, the close and productive relationship between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union is continuously being strengthened. The Secretary-General is pleased with the efforts currently under way to act on the suggestions contained in his report to the General Assembly (A/55/996) concerning a new relationship between IPU, the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs, and looks forward to the strengthening of the parliamentary dimension of the work of the United Nations.